

OP-ED

Writing An Op-Ed During Recovery Month

An op-ed, or “opposite the editorial pages,” effectively raises awareness for **National Recovery Month: Prevention Works, Treatment is Effective, People Recover (Recovery Month)**. Op-eds are opinion pieces that allow you to express your perspective in a public forum with maximum exposure. Anyone can write an op-ed, whether you are someone in recovery, personally affected by a family member's substance use and/or mental disorder, or a health care provider, treatment, or recovery support worker in the field. The tips below provide the resources to get started.

How Do I Start Planning Out My Op-ed?

Brainstorming ideas surrounding this year's **Recovery Month** theme, **“Join the Voices for Recovery: Recovery Benefits Everyone,”** is a good place to start when writing your op-ed. Health reform is a current topic of conversation and impacts access to health insurance for millions. The Affordable Care Act gives Americans more freedom and control over their health care, as well as new benefits that ensure people will receive the care they need at a more reasonable cost. You can learn more about SAMHSA's support of health reform implementation and its goal to reduce disparities that currently exist between the availability of services for substance use and mental disorders through its [Strategic Initiatives](#).

Your op-ed could have a significant impact on your community by providing much-needed information about how people can access the care they need in this new environment. It might also be helpful to note that the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's](#) (SAMHSA's) [Center for Substance Abuse Treatment](#) (CSAT), within the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#) (HHS), sponsors this annual national observance.

Before you start to write, keep in mind the following tips:

- **Identify** which publication in your area best fits your message and will allow maximum readership. Local newspapers usually publish op-eds that focus on community issues, while top-tier newspapers focus on a broader, national scope.
- **Start early**, as publications receive a large amount of op-eds, and you might have to submit it a month or two before September, and sometimes more than once for it to be seen by the right person.
- **Create a relationship** with the editor in advance to help push through your op-ed. Always plan out what you are going to say before you call or email them and provide background information about yourself, organization, and **Recovery Month**, in addition to any local and State recovery issues.
- **Remember** to have one clear and concise topic or idea. Simple messages allow readers to stay focused and walk away with the message you are trying to convey. For example, if you decide to speak about how recovery positively affects your community, stay on the local level and don't expand nationwide.
- **Refer** to the sample op-ed at the [end of this document](#) for ideas. You also can tailor the sample op-ed to help express your ideas or fit your organization's needs.

What is the Most Effective Way to Write My Op-ed?

Once you have selected your topic and the publication(s) suited to your message, try to incorporate the **Recovery Month** mission and this year's **Recovery Month** theme, **“Join the Voices for Recovery: Recovery Benefits Everyone.”** This year's theme emphasizes that all Americans have the opportunity to access provisions within the Affordable Care Act and Mental Health Parity and Addictions Equity Act (MHPAEA), aimed to improve physical and emotional health while ensuring people will receive the care they need at a more reasonable cost. As you write, keep in mind that not only during September, but year-round, **Recovery Month** celebrates individuals in long-term recovery, acknowledges those who provide recovery support services, and empowers those in need of help to seek treatment.

The tips below will help you when you're starting to write.

- **Express an opinion** through a strong lead paragraph that clearly states your viewpoint and the cause you support.
- **Provide background** information or facts and figures to increase the impact. Refer to the resources listed below to make your op-ed more compelling.
 - Single-State Agency (SSA) for substance use and mental health prevention, treatment, and recovery support services
 - SAMHSA's *National Survey on Drug Use and Health*
 - SAMHSA's Recovery Statement
 - SAMHSA's National Survey of Substance Abuse Treatment Services (N-SSATS)
 - SAMHSA's Drug Abuse Warning Network
 - SAMHSA's Treatment Episode Data Set
 - HealthCare.gov
 - Kaiser Family Foundation's Focus on Health Reform
 - Mental Health America
 - State Directory of Consumer Affairs (NAC/SMHA)
 - The Parity Implementation Coalition's Parity Toolkit
- **Use a recent local story**, such as a personal account of a prominent community member in recovery, to connect with readers and make it personal. Use an active voice, rather than passive voice. For example, active voice is "I changed because of recovery" whereas passive voice is, "Recovery was the change."
- **Keep your op-ed** to about 600 words, but be sure to confirm specific op-ed guidelines with your newspaper. Refer to the section below for **tips** on how to submit your op-ed.
- **Make sure your op-ed is reader-friendly** by avoiding acronyms or terms unfamiliar to those outside your field. Newspapers are usually written at the fifth-grade level.
- **Include your name**, contact information, and a description of who you are and any other facts that highlight your qualifications. Some newspapers will contact you before printing an op-ed to verify your information.

Under the Affordable Care Act, insurance companies will be prohibited from imposing lifetime limits in all health plans and insurance policies and starting in 2011, young people, up to age 26, can remain on their parents' health insurance policy. To learn more about health reform refer to the "Fast Facts About Health Reform, Substance Use and Mental Disorders, Treatment, and Recovery" document in this toolkit.

How Do I Submit My Op-ed?

While you may submit your op-ed to several publications at once, if you receive word that it will be published, you have to withdraw your other submissions, as it is usually considered an exclusive to the paper. Publications receive a large amount of op-eds and most newspapers won't publish your op-ed if they think it will be printed elsewhere or has already been published in another outlet. Also, if your op-ed is rejected at first, be open to modifications as long as it keeps your message intact. Only move on to a new outlet if you are certain that the first paper contacted won't publish your op-ed.

The tips below will help you when you're submitting your op-ed.

- **Research** the publication's guidelines for submitting an op-ed, submission deadlines, word count minimums or maximums, and how the editor wants to receive the op-ed (some prefer U.S. mail or fax instead of email).
- **Include a cover letter** to introduce yourself when sending your op-ed, include previous interactions with the editor, a brief overview of the op-ed, and information about **Recovery Month**.
- **Place a follow-up call** to the editor one week after submitted. If he or she has not had time to look at it yet, follow-up a week later. Be polite; state the importance of publishing your piece to help others.

If your op-ed is rejected, or your local paper does not publish op-eds by community members, consider exploring online outlets as options.

- Ask the publication's website editor if your op-ed can be posted on the online version of the newspaper. Other online publications such as [Slate](#), [iVillage](#), and [The Huffington Post](#) might be interested in your op-ed, especially if it ties into the larger theme of **Recovery Month** and health reform.
- Blogs are another online outlet to consider. Tweaking your op-ed to directly relate to a specific readership online can help spread your message. Many bloggers enjoy covering local, altruistic events for their audience and most newspapers now have online bloggers that focus on specific issues. There may be a local community blogger dedicated specifically to news and events in your area—in Washington, DC, there are blogs such as [We Love DC](#)—and those outlets might be interested in September **Recovery Month** efforts.

How Do I Share My Op-ed After it is Published?

The **Recovery Month website** is always interested in your published op-ed and any successes you had in promoting **Recovery Month**. If your op-ed is published, it may be picked up by news sites such as [Google News](#) or [Yahoo News](#). Search using keywords or the title of your op-ed to see if it has been reprinted elsewhere. Share them by:

- Posting your published op-ed on the **Recovery Month website**, [Facebook page](#), and [Twitter account](#). If you need help on how to use these online tools, visit the "[New Media Glossary](#)" and "[Developing Your Social Network](#)" documents in this toolkit.
- Distributing your event details, materials, and pictures to the outlets above.
- Sending a copy of your published op-ed and placement information electronically to recoverymonth@samhsa.hhs.gov or to:

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
ATTN: Consumer Affairs
Center for Substance Abuse Treatment
1 Choke Cherry Road, Second Floor
Rockville, MD 20857

Also, we encourage you to fill out the "[Customer Satisfaction Form](#)" to share your outreach efforts and give feedback.

Additional Recovery Month Resources

For further information on **Recovery Month**, substance use and mental disorders, treatment and recovery, use the following resources:

- **SAMHSA's National Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP (4357)**, or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD) – Provides 24-hour free and confidential information about substance use and mental disorders, prevention, treatment, and recovery referrals in English or Spanish.
- **SAMHSA's "Find Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment" Website (<http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>)** – Contains information about treatment options and special services located in your area.
- **The Recovery Month Website (<http://www.recoverymonth.gov>)** – Contains all the materials from this toolkit and a wide variety of relevant resources.
- **SAMHSA's ADS Center (<http://www.stopstigma.samhsa.gov>)** – Provides information and assistance to develop successful efforts to counteract prejudice and discrimination and promote social inclusion.

Inclusion of websites and event examples in this document and on the Recovery Month website does not constitute official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

OP-ED TEMPLATE

Approximately **533** words

How New Health Care Options Will Help the Nation and Individuals with Substance Use and/or Mental Disorder

Help is on its way if you or someone you know suffers from a substance use or mental disorder and is currently uninsured. Substance use and mental disorders are conditions that, with professional help, can be treated like any other condition. The Affordable Care Act signed in March 2010 includes many new provisions aimed to improve physical and emotional health while ensuring people will receive the care they need at a more reasonable cost. Those in need of treatment and recovery support services will be able to receive help, improve their overall health and well-being, and reclaim their lives.

Every September, people throughout the Nation celebrate the annual National **Recovery Month: Prevention Works, Treatment is Effective, People Recover (Recovery Month)** observance, a national initiative sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT). I'm urging all members of **[community/city/town]** to take a few minutes and recognize the importance of recovery through a variety of treatment resources and recovery support programs. By doing this, you will fulfill several of SAMHSA's **Strategic Initiatives**, particularly the goals of increasing public awareness of substance use and mental disorders, health reform implementation, and offering recovery support through an individual, program, and system approach.

According to the **2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health**, an estimated 22.5 million people aged 12 or older in the United States met criteria for substance use disorders and an estimated 45.1 million adults aged 18 or older in the United States met criteria for a mental health problem in 2009. With new laws in place requiring health insurance coverage, those suffering from these conditions will have expanded access to treatment and recovery services. As a responsible community, we must acknowledge and embrace the positive impact of treatment and recovery assistance.

Having **[been in recovery for XX years / worked in the recovery field for XX years / other statement of personal experience]**, I have firsthand knowledge of the devastation that addiction and/or mental illness brings to individuals and their families. This is a real issue in this community, with an estimated **[number]** people needing treatment last year in **[community/city/town/State]**. It is our duty to educate the public about the effectiveness of treatment, and we hope that you can support this initiative by attending a **Recovery Month** event **[or list specific event in your area here]**. **[Name of organization]** is celebrating **Recovery Month** 2011 by holding a variety of educational and entertaining events **[or name specific event]** to honor individuals and families who are in long-term recovery, and acknowledge those working in the field who provide recovery services.

By supporting **Recovery Month** efforts and informing the public about how the Affordable Care Act and MHPAEA will change the access to treatment and recovery services, you are helping your community and society as a whole. Substance use and mental disorders affect our entire community, and I urge local businesses, community organizations, colleges, schools, administrators, and government agencies to support individuals in need of help, and those in recovery. Additionally, please provide information about local treatment and recovery resources on your websites and link to additional information available at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>.

[Include author name, title, and brief summary of qualifications that make him or her an expert.]

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